

# VU Research Portal

## A new Historical Anthropology? A plea to take a fresh look at practice theory

Roodenburg, H.W.

**published in**  
Historisches Forum  
2012

**document version**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Roodenburg, H. W. (2012). A new Historical Anthropology? A plea to take a fresh look at practice theory. *Historisches Forum*, 14, 93-105. [http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/e\\_histfor/14/PHP/Beitraege\\_14-2012.php#1826](http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/e_histfor/14/PHP/Beitraege_14-2012.php#1826)

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**E-mail address:**  
[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

### A New Historical Anthropology? A Plea to Take a Fresh Look at Practice Theory von Herman Roodenburg

Is historical anthropology only a German thing? Of course, it is also practiced in Austria and German-speaking Switzerland, but I am fairly certain that few cultural historians outside these three countries would still describe their work as historical anthropology, let alone that they would organize an internet forum on the subject. Indeed, for most of them historical anthropology seems to be something of the past. Like Peter Burke, they may see it as merely a „moment“ in cultural history, roughly the 1970s and 1980s - during which cultural historians had a special affinity with social and cultural anthropology. This moment ended in the late 1980s with the emergence of a „new cultural history“ drawing on a plurality of approaches and disciplines ranging from Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault to gender studies, cultural studies or media studies.<sup>1</sup> German as well as Austrian and Swiss historians followed suit, speaking of the *neue Kulturgeschichte* or *Kulturgeschichte* in general. Yet they also held on to *historische Anthropologie*, even launching a journal by that name in 1993 and writing several introductions to the field.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps cultural history is like *Volkskunde* (an important influence on *historische Anthropologie*) a *Vielnamenfach*. Let us not spend too much energy on such discussions. However, worthy of note (and the subject of my paper) is the renewed interest in anthropology among cultural historians. Historical anthropology seems to be back again under a different guise. Two developments stand out. First, there has been a veritable explosion of historical studies on the senses and the emotions, many of them inspired by anthropological studies on sensory and emotional cultures outside the West. Second, a growing

number of cultural historians, myself included, have become interested in issues of body and mind. Not satisfied with studying a single sense or emotion or studying the senses and the emotions as hardly related to each other, they have turned to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus or to other anthropologists and social scientists working with similar phenomenological approaches to the body. Like these anthropologists they explore the uses of twentieth-century phenomenology, especially the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Distancing themselves from the mentalism of the linguistic turn, which so much dominated both the historical anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s and the new cultural history, they prefer to draw on the present phenomenological or corporeal turn. It is this second, emerging development that I would like to outline in this paper. I will focus on the cultural history of images (one of my own fields of interests), more specifically on the viewers' bodily, sensory and emotional response to images.

#### 1. Michael Baxandall

My starting point is Michael Baxandall's well-known study on painting and experience in fifteenth-century Italy, published in 1972. In it Baxandall introduced his notion of the „period eye“, the equipment that a contemporary public brings to complex visual stimulations like pictures. He concentrated on what he ironically summarized as the church-going business man, with a taste for dancing, arguing that the perception, the cognitive skills and ways of seeing, of these well-do-merchants who commissioned the paintings was strongly informed by their everyday experiences, by such routine practices as gauging visually the volumes of barrels as well as their social dancing or their listening to and watching a sermon. Interestingly, Bourdieu admired the period eye. As Allan Langdale, one of Baxandall's pupils, concluded, he may have even „grasped the concept's potential more than anyone else“.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* Cambridge 2004, pp. 30-48.

<sup>2</sup>Gert Dressel, *Historische Anthropologie. Eine Einführung*, Wien 1996; Richard van Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie. Entwicklung, Probleme, Aufgaben*, Köln 2004; Jakob Tanner, *Historische Anthropologie zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford 1972; Allan Langdale, *Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall's Concept of the Period Eye*, in: Adrian Rifkin (ed.), *About Michael Baxandall*, Oxford

In fact, until reading Langdale's essay on the critical reception of the period eye, I was unaware of Bourdieu's interest and was fascinated to learn that Baxandall had gained the admiration of both Bourdieu and Clifford Geertz, whose theories of culture differ so completely. Geertz was one of the most prominent advocates of the linguistic turn, construing culture as a plurality of „texts“ we can „read“, while Bourdieu, in developing his own concept of the habitus and thereby drawing on Merleau-Ponty, already anticipated the present corporeal or phenomenological turn.

In the following pages I will compare how both social scientists adopted Baxandall's notion of the period eye, but will focus on Bourdieu's adoption, as I believe that the present phenomenological turn in cultural history may profit considerably from Bourdieu's and Baxandall's central interest in our embodied skills and habits, in the infusion of our bodies with history. Practice theory should play an important role<sup>4</sup>, if only as a corrective to the all too fashionable interest in the neurosciences, in particular the research on our mirror neurons.

## 2. Clifford Geertz

Let us start with Clifford Geertz, who approved of *Painting and Experience* already in his 1976 essay „Art as a Cultural System“. Leafing through the last pages of the book we understand why. There Baxandall observed: „An old picture is the record of visual activity. One has to learn to read it, just as one has to learn to read a text from a different culture, even when one knows, in a limited sense, the language: both language and pictorial representation are conventional activities“. As he continued, „the pictures become documents as valid as any charter or parish role“.<sup>5</sup>

It is illuminating to compare this final observation with a very

1999, pp. 17-35.

<sup>4</sup>For a similar (and excellent) argument focusing on the cultural history of emotions, see Monique Scheer, *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History?) A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion*, in: *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012), pp. 193-220.

<sup>5</sup>Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, p. 152.

similar one made a year earlier, in 1975, by Natalie Zemon Davis. She wrote, „as cultural artifacts a journeymen's initiation rite, a village festive organization (...) or a street disturbance could be 'read' as fruitfully as a diary, a political tract, a sermon, or a body of laws“. Or take Robert Darnton, another cultural historian much inspired by Geertz. In his *The Great Cat Massacre*, published in 1984, he noted: „one can read a ritual or a city in the same way just as one can read a folktale or a philosophical text“.<sup>6</sup> This was the linguistic turn all over. In the 1970s and 1980s many cultural historians and also art and literary historians followed in the same tracks, though unfortunately few cultural historians working on the early modern period also investigated images.

In his essay Geertz devoted some eight pages to the period eye, and praised the book as a whole. As he informs us, „it takes precisely the sort of approach I here am advocating“, and that approach was of course a „semiotic science of art“. He dismisses the view, perhaps found only in the West, that „technical talk about art“ – talking in craft terms such as „harmony“ or „pictorial composition“ – would suffice to understand art. Instead, he wishes to contextualize art, to situate it in the wider context of other „expressions of human purpose“ such as religion, morality, science, commerce, technology, politics, amusements, or law. After all, an artist works with signs that have a place in semiotic systems extending far beyond the craft he practices.<sup>7</sup> It is also this contextualizing perspective, the wish to study even the most diverse phenomena in terms of each other, which many cultural historians would derive from Geertz. One of them was the critic Stephen Greenblatt who along with the art historian Svetlana Alpers co-chaired the founding board of *Representations*, one of the linguistic turn's most important journals. In the „new historicism“ as advocated

<sup>6</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford (CA) 1975; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York 1984, pp. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Clifford Geertz, *Art as a Cultural System*, in: idem, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York 1983, pp. 102-109.

by Greenblatt, each literary work should be situated „in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment“. Or to quote Alpers, „Art, as Clifford Geertz has shown us, is part and parcel of a cultural system“.<sup>8</sup>

Geertz quoted liberally from *Painting and Experience*. We are informed about the importance of visual skills and habits, both to the painters and their audiences. We read about the merchants' everyday practices of gauging barrels and how this skill enhanced their visual sense of concrete mass, their recognizing of, for instance, cylinders or cones. We also read about dancing, sharpening the merchants' skill at interpreting figure patterns, or their watching the bodily eloquence of preachers, with their „stylized physical expressions of feeling“. Having sketched this complex visual equipment, Baxandall even spoke of Piero della Francesca's „gauged sort of painting“, Fra Angelico's „preached sort of painting“, and Botticelli's „danced sort of painting“ – all examples, according to Geertz, of how painting in fifteenth-century Italy was related to a plurality of semiotic systems extending far beyond itself. But there are two notable omissions in Geertz's account. He did not indicate Baxandall's interest in the workings of the brain, as demonstrated in *Painting and Experience* (and in later publications as well), nor did he mention Baxandall's interest in the actual inculcation of skills, which is certainly the most revealing omission. Baxandall's point that the period eye – involving all of these bodily and sensory skills of gauging, preaching, dancing and, of course, painting – is always inculcated, left him cold, and he failed to notice that Baxandall repeatedly speaks of a „disposition“, developed through such processes of inculcation, „to address visual experience“. However, it was just these features that fascinated Bourdieu, and so let us continue with his interpretation of the period eye.

### 3. Pierre Bourdieu

<sup>8</sup>Stephen Greenblatt, *Resonance and Wonder*, in: *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43 (1990), 4, p. 20; Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago 1983, p. 8.

According to my teachers at the University of Amsterdam – undoubtedly influenced by the Anglo-American reception of Bourdieu as essentially a „conflict theorist“ – habitus was not too interesting a concept. They described it as a more complex equivalent of taste, part of the elite's more implicit arsenal of strategies in social closure.<sup>9</sup> It was only after re-reading Bourdieu, trying to understand his appreciation of the period eye, that I discovered how strongly his thinking on habitus had been informed by phenomenology, and in particular by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, his most important teacher at the École Normale Supérieure. Underlying his notion of the habitus and his enthusiastic response to the period eye was his teacher's philosophical rehabilitation of the body, of bodily knowing and bodily skills, and his teacher's opening up of philosophy to the historical and the social sciences.<sup>10</sup>

To briefly summarize, Bourdieu described the habitus as a system of embodied feelings and thoughts, functioning at every moment as a kind of „scheme“ or „disposition“, a matrix of all our perceptions, appreciations and actions. He stressed the habitus' generative and largely prereflective nature, and drew attention to the central role of early socialization and training. The schemes or dispositions constituting the habitus have been inculcated, even literally „incorporated“, from the very first days of life, thus turning „history“ into „nature“, into bodily automatisms. Of course, musicians, especially jazz pianists, know such automatisms well, their improvisations hinge on such intertwining of body and mind.<sup>11</sup> But they were already described by Descartes (who never was the confirmed cartesian that so many twentieth-century philosophers and scientists would make of him). In a letter written in 1640 to his friend Marin Mersenne, he professed his belief that all our

<sup>9</sup>On this reception, see Omar Lizardo, *The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu's Habitus*, in: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 34 (2004) 4, pp. 376-377.

<sup>10</sup>On these important influences, see Jeremy F Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction*, London and Sterling 2000, pp. 102; Marie-Anne Lescouret, *Bourdieu. Vers une économie du bonheur*, Paris 2008, pp. 19-20, 25, 56-57, 136-139, 169-170, 176.

<sup>11</sup>See for instance the famous study by David Sudnow, both jazz pianist and ethnomethodologist: *Ways of the Hand: The Organization of Improvised Conduct*, Cambridge Ma. 1978.

nerves and muscles serve the memory. He continued, „so that a lute player, for instance, has a part of his memory in his hands; for the ease of bending and positioning his fingers in various ways, which he has acquired by practice, helps him to remember the passages which need these positions when they are played“.<sup>12</sup> In other words, processes of inculcation, of all kinds of skills already instilled from early childhood on, are central to the habitus concept and became even more so in Bourdieu's later, more historically oriented thought. It was also this incorporatory dimension that was emphasized by Bruno Latour. As he noted: „This is why Bourdieu's notion of habitus, once it is freed from its social theory, remains such an excellent concept.“<sup>13</sup>

Bourdieu devoted two essays to the period eye: one in 1981, also quoted by Langdale, and another, relatively unknown one in his *Les Règles de l'Art*, published in 1992.<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu was hardly interested in a semiotic theory of art. On the contrary, right at the start of the latter essay he faulted his earlier musings on artistic perception as being too „intellectualist“, as construing such perception merely as an act of „reading“ or „decoding“, the kind of analysis he deemed typical of the Panofskyan and, especially, the „semiological“ tradition, then at its peak. Bourdieu objected to the one-sidedness, the limitations, of such linguistic approaches. He observed that they overlook the understanding „immediately available to an indigenous contemporary“. They omit the practical schemes and dispositions involved in such understanding, those „which never crop up as such in consciousness“.

In his view, scholars studying the perception of art should always include this native comprehension, which unlike their own understanding has no theory or concept, is largely bodily and prereflective

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in T.J. Reiss, Denying the Body? Memory and the Dilemmas of History in Descartes, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996), pp. 587-607.

<sup>13</sup>Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005, pp. 209 n. 280.

<sup>14</sup>Pierre Bourdieu / Yvette Dessault, Pour une sociologie de la perception, in: *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 40 (1989), pp. 3-9; I used the English translation of *Les règles de l'art: Pierre Bourdieu, The Social Genesis of the Eye*, in: idem, *The Rules of Art*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 313-321.

in nature. This was Baxandall's central and innovative insight according to Bourdieu, close to his own notions of habitus and practice. The schemes of perception and appreciation involved in the merchants' immediate comprehension of art derived from their everyday life, their daily and multisensory experience of the sermon, the dance and the market. As Bourdieu concluded, this aesthetics differed greatly from Kant's and its reconstruction required a „real labour of historical ethnology“.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Aesthesis

Bourdieu and Geertz, then, took up what they recognized the most from *Painting and Experience*. In the meantime, judging from the book's more recent critical reception, Geertz's semiotic adoption seems to have lost much of its former relevance. For instance, take the art historian Christopher Wood's obituary written in 2008. Looking back at Baxandall's publications, he singled out *Painting and Experience* as the real marvel. He wrote, „Here Baxandall asked the reader, in effect, to occupy the body of the fifteenth-century Florentine patron of altarpieces and frescoes (...)“. He continued: „For the first time the reader was invited to participate in the historically remote everyday by a process of bodily triangulation: We would feel with our bodies, and see with our embodied eyes, what the beholders of Masaccio and Filippo Lippi saw. Baxandall tells us this is strange knowledge that we need to work to acquire, like ethnologists.“<sup>16</sup> Obviously, this is the corporeal and not the linguistic turn (and Wood may have seen Bourdieu's remark on historical ethnology).

Bourdieu, Wood and others who thoroughly examined *Painting and Experience* were undoubtedly right in recognizing some fledgling indications of the present bodily turn. We can indeed only marvel at the richness of the book. It did not only suggest a Geertzian cultural history of images but also, in its notable focus on skills and habits

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 313-316.

<sup>16</sup>Christopher Wood, When Attitudes Became Form: Christopher Wood on Michael Baxandall (1933-2008), in: *ArtForum* (January 2009), pp. 43-44.

embodied, an almost phenomenologically oriented history of images, in which sensory and emotional practices already are included. Somewhat surprisingly, Baxandall only spoke of visual practices – those were the social practices „most immediately relevant to the perception of paintings“.<sup>17</sup> But the practices he described were rather instances of intersensory perception, of synaesthesia. In the merchants' command of gauging volume we easily recognize what many anthropologists and other social scientists would now describe as „haptic visuality“. Similarly, when he discusses the relevance of his merchants' dancing experience or their watching the *actio*, the bodily eloquence, of popular preachers, he is actually describing instances of kinesthetic empathy. No less remarkable is Baxandall's sensitivity to the emotional hold of the paintings. As he writes, with their stylized postural and gestural expression of feeling the preachers coached the public in the painters' emotional repertory, and *vice versa*: „fifteenth-century pictorial development happened within fifteenth-century classes of emotional experience“.<sup>18</sup>

Bourdieu published his essay in 1992. Since then anthropologists studying images have recovered the idea of a corporeal aesthetics. Like Bourdieu rejecting Kantian aesthetics, with its elevation of the „disinterested“ beholder, they have reverted to the Aristotelian concept of aesthesis, which unlike the Kantian notion holds that the ways we engage with images are always bodily and multisensory.<sup>19</sup> Hence the anthropologist Chris Pinney's suggestion of a „corpoethetics“, studying „the sensory embrace of images, the bodily engagement that most people (except Kantians and modernists) have with artworks“. Other social scientists thinking along similar lines suggested the term „so-

<sup>17</sup>Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup>Baxandall, pp. 55-56, 66.

<sup>19</sup>See for instance: Susan Buck-Morss, *Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Art Works Essay Reconsidered*, in: *October* 77 (1992), pp. 3-41; Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, *Aesthetics*, in: David Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, London 2008, pp. 20-30; David Howes, *Hearing Scents, Tasting Sights: Toward a Cross-Cultural Multimodal Theory of Aesthetics*, in: Francesca Bacci and David Melcher (eds.), *Art and the Senses*, Oxford 2011, pp. 161-182.

maesthetics“ or proposed to speak of a „corporeal eye“, a „corporeal image“ or – as Laura Marks did, drawing on the art historian Alois Riegl – of „haptic visuality“.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, various art historians, among them David Freedberg, Michael Fried and David Morgan, have defended a similar sensory integration of the visual. Like the social scientists they have been influenced, the one more so than the other, by the writings of Merleau-Ponty, while Morgan also takes a strong interest in anthropology.<sup>21</sup>

More recently, Freedberg, known for his pioneering work on the emotional impact of images, has taken a different track, looking in particular at the investigations of the Italian neuroscientists Vittorio Gallese and Giacomo Rizzolatti into mirror neurons and empathy as confirming the more intuitive ideas on art and *Einfühlung*, already developed by Robert Vischer and other nineteenth-century art theorists, including Riegl. While such an approach looks attractive if we wish to reconstruct a culture's native comprehension of art, with all its bodily and sensory dimensions, it leaves little room for processes of incorporation. Instead, we had better concentrate on practice theory, with its interest in the historical nature of skills and habits, its conceiving of the body as always historically situated, as trained and plastic. But let us first have a look at one of Freedberg's essays.

#### 4. „Culture tunes our neurons“

In this essay, published in 2008, Freedberg discusses a single work of art, Rubens' *A Peasant Dance* (1636-1640), now in the Prado.<sup>22</sup> As

<sup>20</sup>Christopher Pinney, *Piercing the Skin of the Idol*, in: idem and Nicholas Thomas (eds.), *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, Oxford 2001, p. 158; Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minneapolis 2002. 'Somaesthetics' was coined by the philosopher Richard Shusterman; 'corporeal eye' by the film historian Malcolm Turvey; 'corporeal image' by the visual anthropologist David MacDougall.

<sup>21</sup>See for instance: David Freedberg, *Antropologia e storia dell'arte: la fine delle discipline?*, in: *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* 94 (2008), pp. 5-18; Michael Fried, *Mendel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, New Haven CT 2002; David Morgan, *The Look of the Sacred*, in: Roberto Orsi (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, New York 2009, pp. 296-318.

<sup>22</sup>David Freedberg, *Antropologia e storia dell'arte: la fine delle discipline?*, in:

he tells us, he wants to offer a new interpretation of the painting, one focusing on the motions of the bodies depicted and the emotions involved. After all, how can we look at this bunch of peasants dancing without feeling some 'inner motion', as he calls it, prompting us to mimic all their movements?

Central to Freedberg's interpretation is the so-called „simulation theory of empathy“ that was formulated in the 1990s after Rizzolatti's discovery of mirror neurons in the brain. By replicating (or „mirroring“) at a prereflective level the goal-directed movements of others, these neurons allow humans – without executing the motor act themselves – to grasp the meaning of these movements and the related emotions. Accordingly, in studying how we bodily engage with images, Freedberg prefers to focus on „felt movement of the body rather than on actual movements“, on „the sense of reacting as if one were behaving in physical ways without actually thus behaving“. Wishing to integrate cultural and biological factors, Freedberg also recommends the writings of Bourdieu and those of anthropologists Thomas Csordas, Michael Jackson, Tim Ingold and Carlo Severi, all of whom are working in a phenomenological vein. To address the multiple relationships between images, emotions, and the perception and movements of the body, he sketches a truly interdisciplinary perspective, one that should range from Marcel Mauss' „ethnography of movement“ to the „new sciences of movement“. But are these „new sciences“, the neurosciences, really that relevant? Could we not simply confine ourselves to anthropology and, of course, to the cultural history of the body, the senses and the emotions? Do they not teach us much more about Rubens and his *Peasant Dance*?

Consider a highly interesting study on how our mirror neurons respond differently when watching dances that we have learned to do, for which we have acquired the necessary bodily skills, and dances that we have not. In this neuroscientific study videos of classical ballet and Afro-Brazilian capoeira dance were shown to a group of subjects with

Richerche di Storia dell'Arte 94 (2008), pp. 5-18.

motor experience of ballet, another one with experience of capoeira, and a third group of non-expert control subjects. The results were revealing: while all the subjects saw the same actions, the mirror areas of their brains responded quite differently according to whether they could perform the actions. The ballet dancers showed greater activity in their mirror areas when watching ballet than when watching capoeira moves, while the mirror areas of capoeira dancers showed the opposite effect. For the group with no motor experience of either ballet or capoeira, no such differences were detected. Crucial in each case were the inculcated motor skills. As the researchers concluded, these skills even inform the brain's mirror mechanisms.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, culture or history matters, regardless of how fast and automatically these mechanisms respond – another case, as practice theorists would conclude, of history turned into nature. Recently, cultural historian Monique Scheer cautioned that we should read fMRI scans „as images of a 'used' brain, one molded by the practices of a specific culture, thus turning variations between scans of members of different social groups into meaningful data“.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to Rubens' *A Peasant Dance*, if our acquired motor skills indeed determine the way our mirror neurons respond to the goal-directed movements of others, then we can safely assume that the painter's clients, the monarchs, courtiers and wealthy merchants all buying his art, did not feel much „inner motion“ when confronted with his swirling peasants. As several historians have shown, most members of the early modern elite, especially the men, were taught from childhood on to strengthen their bodies with exercise and to incorporate an elegant upright bearing through dancing, fencing and riding lessons. In other words, the dancing skills they had incorporated already from childhood on differed entirely from those incorporated by

<sup>23</sup>B Calvo-Merino a.o., Action Observation and Acquired Motor Skills: An fMRI Study with Expert Dancers, in: *Cerebral Cortex* 15 (2005), 8, pp. 1243-1249.

<sup>24</sup>Monique Scheer, Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion, in: *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012), p. 220.

## Herman Roodenburg

Rubens' peasant folk.<sup>25</sup> As neuropsychologist Oliver Sacks observed, „culture tunes our neurons“.

### 5. Conclusion

Obviously, cultural history (or, if you like, the new historical anthropology) might profit greatly from anthropologists working in a phenomenological vein and from the present phenomenological turn in general. Yet as I have tried to argue, it also has enough to offer to the scholars (anthropologists and art historians but also psychologists, linguists and philosophers) already involved in the turn, provided that it focuses on the „knowing“ or the „mindful“ body, on how our bodies are always infused with history, as even Descartes realized while playing the lute. Numerous other early modern authors reflected on such issues as well, often in treatises on medicine but also on all kinds of bodily skills, from dancing, fencing and horse-riding to swimming, wrestling or even drawing and painting. These and other authors also discussed the senses and the emotions in ways that remind us more of William James and his interest in habituation than of the generations of psychologists after him. In sum, if we want to understand such texts and to trace which bodily, sensory and emotional equipment men and women in early modern Europe brought to pictures, a fresh look at practice theory (starting with a re-reading of Baxandall's pioneering study) will certainly help.

---

<sup>25</sup>Georges Vigarello, *The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Civility*, in: Michel Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, New York 1989, pp. 149-106; Herman Roodenburg, *The Eloquence of the Body: Studies on Gesture in the Dutch Republic*, Zwolle 2004; in an essay written four years ago but only published this year, I expressed a more positive view on the simulation theory of empathy. See Herman Roodenburg, *The Visceral Pleasures of Looking. On Iconology, Anthropology, and the Neurosciences*, in: Barbara Baert a.o. (eds.), *New Perspectives in Iconology: Visual Studies and Anthropology*, Brussels 2012, pp. 211-229.